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THE
Degeneracy of the Present Age
AS TO
PRINCIPLES.

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SERMON

PREACH'D before the
University of CAMBRIDGE,
On SUNDAY in the Afternoon,
June 25. 1704.

By THOMAS SHERWILL, M. A.
and Fellow of *Christ's College.*

CAMBRIDGE:

Printed at the UNIVERSITY-PRESS, for *Edmund
Jeffery and Thomas Webster, Booksellers in
Cambridge. 1704.*

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2 TIM. IV. 3.

*For the time will come, when they will
not endure sound doctrine——.*

HE that will but give himself the leisure to take a free and impartial Survey of our present Constitution, considered in a Religious or Moral Capacity, will be apt to conclude, that there never was any Age, since the Date of this Epistle, to which this Character of a Degeneracy in Principles might more truly belong, than it doth to the present one we live in : For, altho' I am not so absurd, as to think that the Apostle did either solely or principally intend these times of ours under this Description ; as was frequent for some Enthusiastic Teachers of the late Rebellion, to restrain and limit most of the Prophetical Predictions in Holy Writ to the Age and Countrey they liv'd in ; as if this small spot of Earth, compar'd with the rest of the Christian World, and a Great Part of the Gentile too, was to have been the only Theatre, where those Grand Revolutions and Changes foretold in Scripture should be transacted. Altho', I say, 'tis very certain there was a time long since, when Men were impatient of *sound Doctrine* ; yet had there not been so, the present Generation have taken sufficient

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ent care that the Prophecy should not pass uncompleted.

Herefy and Schism have all along, more or less, infested the Church, and distracted the Peace and Unity thereof; while the Apostles themselves were living, there were not wanting those, who corrupted the Faith by impure Doctrines, by monstrous and ridiculous, yea blasphemous Opinions; of which sort were the *Simonians*, *Menandrians*, *Ebionites*, *Cerinthians* and *Nicolaitans*, usually call'd by that General Name of *Gnostics*: But these were inconsiderable in regard of that innumerable Spawn, which arose soon after, and almost overspread those Parts, where the Gospel had been planted. They, who before had secretly lurk'd in some remote and obscure Corner, not daring as yet to vent their Pestilent Opinions, became emboldned, upon the Decease of the Apostles, openly to assault the Truth, and to advance their unreasonable and groundless Tenets in Opposition to the Clear Light of Revelation it self.

Then was it that the Prince of Darkness did most strenuously exert his whole Force and Cunning, to subvert that Religion, whose Establishment, he well knew, would inevitably prove the Ruine of his Kingdom; and to this end did he employ his Agents, either so to blend the Truth with Error and Nonsense, as to make it unworthy the Reception of a Rational Being, or by a powerful Opposition made against some Principal and Fundamental Article of the Faith, to bear down the True Profession of it by the numeroufness of a Party: And this design was in a likely way to have
taken

taken effect, in the case of the *Arrians* against the *Orthodox*, had not the commendable Zeal and Industry of the Great *Athanasius*, after a long and invidious Struggle and Contest, most happily prevented it.

Now had this Champion of the Orthodox Faith been possess'd with, what some in these days call, the Vertue of Moderation, the Church must infallibly have been born down by the Prevalency of the *Arrian* Faction: For *Eusebius*, Bishop of *Nicomedia*, applauded by some for his Moderation toward the *Arrians*, was at first no other than an *Arrian* under a disguise, and afterward a profess'd one.

Neither, in the next place, to own the Truth, was Schism behind-hand as to its Rise and Origine; for we read of Dissentions in the Churches of *Antioch* and *Corinth*, even in the Apostles days, and so downward to this time has it had its turn in all Ages. Yet, this I will be bold to say that, never was there any National Church divided by a more groundless and incurable, because encourag'd, Schism, than our Church of *England* is; a manifest Token of a Great Corruption in the Minds of Men; For when they will not endure sound Doctrine, then is it that after their own lusts they heap up to themselves Teachers, having itching Ears. And if this Giddy and Unsettled Humour of running from one Teacher to another, and forsaking those whom God hath set over us, be in any wise commendable, we may, in a manner, secure the whole Praise of it to our selves: For no Nation under Heaven, where but the Face of Religion

ligion is kept up and maintain'd, can in this particular be parallel'd to us.

But this is not the only Topic I design to proceed upon, from the words I have made choice of, but to shew, a work perhaps ungrateful, tho' not unnecessary, that whatever Depravity of Opinion might prevail amongst Christians in Former Ages, the same in degree doth still obtain in this; and how prone soever Men heretofore may have been to turn a deaf Ear to wholsom Doctrine, the present Age in this respect may vye with them. And this I shall endeavour to make out, in the *words of Truth and Soberness*, not regarding how obnoxious I may render my self to the Censures of the Injudicious.

For the time is come, when men will not endure sound Doctrine.

I. And that First; Because the Principles of Natural Religion are most audaciously assaulted, most impudently disputed, denied and ridicul'd. As to the Existence of a God, it has been question'd by some, and still is, whether ever there was any who did really disbeleive it; They looking upon the Notion of a Speculative Atheist, as a meer Figment and Chimara, and such as never did yet actually exist in the World.

But a small degree of Knowledge in the History of the Ancient Philosophy will easily disprove this Conceit, and a little Experience of the present Age will soon discover that there are such Monsters yet upon the Stage. For an Example of this kind, we need recur no farther, than to the Beginning of the

the last Century, which furnishes us with a very remarkable one indeed, of an Atheist who arriv'd to that desperate degree of Frenzy that he chose to suffer Death for the Cause, and to offer the *Sacrifice of a Fool*; rather than acknowledge that Necessary Existence had a Being, he submitted, according to the Notions of his Philosophy, to the loss of his own, and depriv'd himself, at once, of the Enjoyment of whatever False God he might have set up in this Life, and of the True one, whose Existence he had constantly defied; The First Martyr that stands recorded in the Atheists Kalendar, and 'tis to be hoped the last. 'Tis true indeed, the Cause of downright Atheism is so very absurd and contradictory, that it happens not, like other Pernicious and Heretical Opinions, to be publicly maintain'd by those, who set up for Men of Reason and Argument: For since the Being of a God is as capable of as strict Demonstration, as any Theorem in the Mathematics, and that upon Axioms as clear and self-evident as any in Science; 'tis hard to conceive, that he who desires to be heard in what he says, should be so sottish as to oppose the Demonstration; when it is impossible he should produce any Medium for that purpose, but what may with as much Reason be contested, as the Proposition he endeavours to overthrow. But there is another sort of Men, tho' I can hardly call them so, who, when Reason should begin to exert it self, have ran directly counter to it in all their Actings, whose whole Life, I may say, has been one uninterrupted Scene of the most Extravagant Madness and Folly, one continued Act of gratifying some Exorbitant

*Caesar Vani
mini burnt
at Tholouse
for Athe-
ism 1619.*

Ap-

Appetite or Passion: And thus far considered indeed, they fall under the Denomination of Practical Atheists; but we may observe them advancing a step farther yet: For when they esteem of Religion as no other than a Piece of Priest-craft, and treat God, and all things Sacred with the utmost Scorn and Contempt, 'tis a plain proof, that they not only not think of God, but think there is none; not only is He absent from their Thoughts; but by a Positive Act of their Will do they explode the Notion of his Being, as made up of nothing but Nonsense and Contradiction.

And if this Grand Principle of all Religion, viz. the Existence of a God has not been able to escape the Affronts of Foolish and Unreasonable Men; how should that other of the Immortality of the Soul? To him, that owns no Invisible Creator of all things, the Doctrine of the Souls Permanency after Death must necessarily sound as a meer Fable or Legend; yea, we find it no better esteem'd of by some, who profess themselves to acknowledge a Deity, and, which is more, Christianity too. 'Tis very well known, what pains a

D'foward M.D. late Writer has taken to overthrow this Great Article of Faith; how industrious he hath been to ridicule and expose it; yea, so confident doth he seem of having the Truth on his side, as to commit his Book to the Patronage of the whole Body of our Clergy; tho', I rather think, it was not without a design'd affront; for 'tis the Interest of those who are fallen out with Religion, to revenge themselves upon the Men that propagate it, and 'tis natural for such as are at Enmity with Truth,

Truth, to reproach those whose Lips preserve it.

Now whether this Doctrine, of the Souls Immortality, be an Heathenish Invention, as he will have it, which, by the way, is no manner of Argument against the Truth of it, or whether, as undoubtedly, it be of as early Date as Mankind it self, I shall only remark this, that what our Saviour denounc'd against the Jews for their Obstinate Incredulity, viz. That *the Queen of the South should rise up in Judgment with them and condemn them*, may in other words be applied to this Author; That the Wise and Sober Part of the Heathen World shall rise up in Judgment with him and condemn him; for they us'd their utmost Endeavours to discover this Truth, so far as it was discernible by the Light of Reason, but behold this Author has the Clearer Light of Revelation. It is Strange and Amazing, that in a Community professing Christianity there should any one be found, so far lost to Reason and Religion, as not to be convinc'd of the Substantiality, Immateriality and Immortality of the Humane Soul; but this were pardonable, had he stop'd here; but when he makes it his business to disperse the poyson of his Notions into the minds of others, thereby to unsettle the weak, and confirm the wavering to his opinion, he ought not to be treated, as one that has advanc'd a great Error only in his Writings, but as one of Evil and Mischievous Designs against all Religion in general. The *Athenians*, as blameable as they might be for their Excessive Superstition, are deservedly Commendable, in that they were severe

Castiga-

St. Matt.
12. 42.

Castigators of all the Affronts, Scorn and Contempt that was at any time cast upon their Gods, and Sacred Mysteries; and however unjustly *Anaxagoras*, *Socrates* and some others might suffer upon that account, yet they are fairly to be acquitted, yea applauded for their proceedings against *Protagoras* of *Abdera*, who, because he had publickly profess'd in his Writings, that he doubted whether there was any God existing or not; They expell'd him their Countrey, and afterwards in a Publick Assembly committed his Book to the Flames. This latter mark of Infamy, I think, Our Worthy *Senators* of the Honourable *House of Commons* thought fit to brand our Author with, and he had had no great cause to complain, if the Government had impos'd the other. It may not, perhaps, be altogether improbable, to conjecture what might give occasion to his Heterodox and Heretical Treatises; a Principle, advanc'd of late by an Author of Great Acuteness and Subtlety, viz. *That Matter is capable of Cogitation*: A Notion sufficiently absurd in it self, and, I must add, Atheistical too, when I consider the direct tendency it hath to the introducing of Universal Corporealism; and yet, for all this, how smoothly doth this Notion pass with some Men, who, I am confident, must abhor the Consequence of it; and for which I can give my self no other Reason at present, but that they are loth to disapprove of any Principle this Author has set up in Philosophy, out of the good Liking and Esteem they have for those other Principles of his in Politics.

II. Secondly. Another sort of Men we have, who acknowledge indeed a God and a Providence, but then wholly reject Revelation, and entertain a very mean and low Esteem of the Scriptures and the Christian Religion; To some Historical parts of Holy-Writ they may, perhaps, give their Assent, as to a Common History; but the whole Narrative of our Saviour's Life and Death, and Sufferings, of his Resurrection and Ascension, of the Miracles wrought by him and his Apostles, they esteem of, as a meer Contrivance of the First Preachers of the Gospel. These are they, who *Professing themselves to be wise become Fools*, for Rom. 1. 22. such is every one who flights and contemns the Inspired Writings, that inexhaustible Treasury of Divine Wisdom and Eloquence, which, and only which is *able to make him wise unto Salvation*. These 2 Tim. 3. 15. are the Modern Sceptics of the Age, who think that no Religion as yet is Establish'd upon Sufficient Grounds of Credibility; who, because the Truth of Christianity is incapable of being prov'd by that sort of Demonstration, whereby Geometrical Propositions are, do therefore think fit to reject it: But, in the mean while, do they not shew themselves most unreasonable in requiring more proof, than the Nature of the thing can admit of, and betray a Great Defect of Judgment, in not knowing when Evidence is fitted and proportioned to the matter in hand that is to be proved? It would be Superfluous to what I have undertaken, to engage in Controversy with the Deist, and altogether needless, considering how shamefully of late their Cause hath been baffled by that laudable

Lecture
Founded
by the
Honourable
Robert
Boyle.

1 Tim. i. 15.

Care that was taken for that Purpose; I only mention them in this Place, as falling in with my present Subject: For if the Holy Scriptures are a *Form of Sound Words*, if it be a *Doctrine worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the World to save Sinners*; The Deist, who denies Christianity in the gross with all its Essentials, doth most signally approve himself of the Number of those who *will not endure Sound Doctrine*.

III. Thirdly. Another sort yet we have, who allow indeed that God has actually made a Revelation of his will to Mankind; that he *spoke in time past unto the Fathers by the Prophets*, and *in these last days has spoken unto us by his Son*; yet with Great Arrogance do they presume to limit and confine the Infinite Wisdom, as to what it shall Reveal, and what not; and these are the Disciples of *Socinus*. For what else is it, that when such and such Doctrines are delivered in Scripture, in Words of a plain and determinate Sense, where there can be no room for Metaphor, according to the usual Modes of Speech, they shall endeavour all they can to elude the true and genuine Meaning of them, by frivolous and groundless Distinctions, or by frigid and inept Explications, or by distorting the Words from their Natural Import and Signification to a strain'd and Figurative Sense, where there is no Cause to recede from the literal one?

By such wretched Shifts and Evasions as these, by such arbitrary and precarious suppositions, do they think to disentangle themselves from an Obligation to believe whatever soars above the Pitch
of

of their Reason to comprehend, notwithstanding it comes recommended to them by Him who can neither err nor deceive, and is supported upon the sure Testimony of Truth it self. And all the while they thus contend against any things being incomprehensible in the Christian Institution, they must be forc'd to acknowledge that there are Truths in Nature and Natural Religion, most abstruse and mysterious, such as they can never dispute or deny, which yet are altogether as inexplicable by them, and in the Contemplation of which Their Reason is as much bewildred and lost; as in those sublime Mysteries of our Faith, *viz.* The Doctrine of Three Distinct Subsistencies in the Divine Essence, and but One God; and that of the Union of the God-head and Man-hood in one and the same Individual Person.

Were these Men of Great Reason, as they think themselves to be, and of as little Faith, but able to draw a Parallel between these Doctrines and that of Transubstantiation, they would be much in the right to reject them: But since they never could charge our Faith with any thing Contradictious, and at the same time make good their Charge; since no Article of our Belief is in any wise Repugnant to Right Reason, how much soever it may mount above it; 'tis evident that by withholding their Assent to these Grand and Important Truths, they most shamefully frustrate the great End for which the Gospel was wrote, which, as *St. John* tells us, was, *That we might believe that Jesus was the Christ, the son of God, and that believing we might have Life through his Name.*

*St. Joh. 20.
31.*

IV. Fourthly. Another sort of Men who *will not endure Sound Doctrine*, are they who, by causlessly dividing from our Communion, break the Peace and Unity of the Church: and are the main Occasion of our Discords here at home, and the Scandal of the Reformation abroad. And of these there are various Sects and Denominations, as *Presbyterians, Independents, Anabaptists, Quakers, Antimonians*, and what not? For when once Men forsake the Path of Truth, the Maze of Error is infinite; and it is no Security to any of these Parties, that they themselves are in the right, only by being Exempt from the mistakes of each other. But then, all this while, what affords matter of a melancholy Consideration is, that how much soever they may differ amongst themselves in some things: yet they unanimously agree in a resolute and unreasonable Opposition against our Church, to the manifest Danger of her Establishment, and to the Great Prejudice of the Common Interest of Religion.

“ O unhappy Church, founded according to the
 “ Laws and Rules of the Gospel, regulated by the
 “ Model of the Primitive and Purest Ages, whose
 “ Government is of Divine Institution, whose Faith
 “ and Practice is Orthodox and Sound, whose
 “ Worship is settled in the Golden Mean between
 “ Superstition and Sordid Neglect, not burden'd
 “ with an Excess of Ceremonies on the one hand,
 “ or impair'd thro' a defect of Order and Solemnity
 “ on the other, equally remote from the Gaudy
 “ Fopperies and Pageantry of the *Church of Rome*,
 “ and the Indecency and Slovenlinefs of *Fanaticism*, whose Constitution is esteem'd and admir'd

“ mir’d by thoſe abroad, and eſtabliſh’d by Good
 “ and Wholſom Laws at home! Yet how art thou
 ſlighted, contemn’d, and undermin’d by open and
 profeſs’d Enemies of the Separation; and unwor-
 thily betray’d by ſecret ones within thine own Bo-
 ſom! So that that Prediction of the *Royal Prophet*,
 which the *Evangelists* apply to the Perſon of our St. Joh. 13.
18.
 Lord himſelf, the Head, is true alſo as to the pu-
 reſt Part of his Myſtical Body, the Church: He,
*which did eat of my Bread, hath lift up his heel a-
 gainſt me.* Pſal. 41. 9.

But not to perſiſt in a Digreſſion in the needleſs,
 tho’ juſt Encomiums of our preſent Church; I
 proceed to ſhew, which, I think, will not be fo-
 reign to the buſineſs in hand; That they who have
 divided from us, have at the ſame time divided
 from the Truth, and, by forſaking our Commu-
 nion, have rejected *Sound Doctrine*. And this
 will appear by the following particulars.

I. Firſt, Obedience to Governors, I ſuppoſe,
 none can deny to be a Neceſſary Duty, and in the
 ſame Breath own the Scriptures, as a Rule of our
 Behaviour, wherein it is ſo frequently inculcated,
 and ſo ſtrictly enjoyn’d us. Yet, how ſmall a re-
 gard have thoſe of the Diſſention, I mean, the De-
 ſigning Party of them; for ſome, without doubt,
 are betray’d in amongſt them, through a miſtaken
 Zeal, who otherwiſe are well meaning, and wholly
 ignorant of the Ends which their Leaders drive at?
 how ſmall a regard, I ſay, has the Deſigning Party
 of them to this Duty? So very ſmall, that, without
 any breach of Charity, one may pronounce of them,
 and

and their known Principles and Practice will bear me out in what I say, that they neither care to
 1 Pet. 2. 13, *submit to the King, as supreme, or unto Governors,*
 14. *as unto them that are sent, or commission'd by him.*
 And it is no argument against what I say, to urge that they are not at this Juncture, or have been for some time past, in any actual Rebellion; for I take them not to be so very Impolitic, as to sound the Trumpet to Sedition, unless they were first well assured they had Forces sufficient to compleat a Conquest, or at least to make a safe Retreat.

Such are the Principles of our Sectaries, notoriously Antimonarchical and Republican, and, I wish, since they are no better, they were confined to that Party only; but, I fear, the Venom is spread farther, and the Leaven extended beyond the Body of the Separation.

Now must not that Government be in a very safe Condition, where this cursed Position shall come to be a Principle generally avowed? *That 'tis lawful for Subjects to take up Arms against their Lawful Sovereign, upon pretence of preserving Religion, or preventing any Grievances they may lye under.* To assert this, what is it but to open a wide Gate to Rebellion? to render the Title of our Prince so very uncertain and precarious, that when ever Popular Faction shall have Weight enough to turn the Scale; and it will never want a pretence whereby to justify its proceedings; He that is a King to day, may be every ones Inferior to morrow, and the meanest of his Subjects may mount the Throne, and Lord it over him,

To consider what the Effects were of this very Principle pursu'd not many years since, were enough, one would think, to cause every Man who retains any Sense of Duty to his Prince, or has any Regard to the Peace and Welfare of his Countrey to abominate and detest it.

What Desolation and Bloodshed? What Rapine and Slaughter were committed in this Kingdom, and all upon the score of this Principle?

The Best of Kings most inhumanely Murder'd in cold Blood, in defiance to all Religion and Law, Humanity and Justice, or whatever else is Sacred and Obligatory to Mankind.

What Injustice, Cruelty and Barbarity were acted, and all as the immediate and necessary Result of this Tenet? An evident proof that it can never be Christian; that it never was taught by the *Prince of Peace*, but borrowed rather out of the *Alcoran*, and calculated for the Religion of *Mahomet*.

And how should it otherwise be, when the Fundamental Maxim whereon this Doctrine is grounded is unsound and rotten? *viz. That all Power is Originally in the People, and that the Authority whereby Princes Govern, is deriv'd from them, and depends wholly upon some Mutual Compact and Agreement between them.* Now in answer hereto, I shall only refer the Men of this Perswasion to argue the Matter fairly with *St. Paul*, who tells us, that *The Powers that be are ordain'd of God*, Rom. 13.1. *τας δυνάμεις* put into that Rank or Order which they hold by him, how then are they set up by the People? and that they which resist the Power, resist an Ordinance, not of their own, but, of God.

Our

*Vide, his
Preface to
the Jesuits
Loyalty.*

Our *Church of England*, to her great Credit be it spoken, has all along, even from the Infancy of the Reformation, preserv'd a very tender and conscientious Regard to the Rights of Princes, as appears by her Articles, Canons, Injunctions, Homilies and Liturgy; in which respect She stands in Opposition as well to Papiſts as Dissenters: For the Deposing Doctrine of the Church of *Rome*, and the Principles of a Common-wealths-man, are of nearer Affinity to each other than is commonly imagin'd; and this the late Incomparable *Bishop of Worcester* has made out, by running the Parallel between them in several particulars. Yea, the Deposing Doctrine, I may add, is the more tolerable of the two, in as much as Invasion is not half so odious and detestable as Rebellion. To conclude this Head then, (which I have the longer insisted on, because I know no instance of a more General Revolt from *Sound Doctrine*, and wherein Men more stiffly and confidently maintain their Error than in this.) If the Doctrine of Obedience to Princes, in that manner wherein Our Church asserts it, be truly Christian, then how much soever it may happen at any time to be out of Vogue and Esteem: yet the Obligation thereto must be perpetual, and like the Author of it, *The same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.*

Heb. 13. 8.

II. It is evident in the next place, that the Separatists are Men impatient of *sound doctrine*, were it for no other reason, than that they have withdrawn themselves from our Church, where the Pure Word of God is duly preached, and the Sacraments

craments rightly administred; or, in the Apostles Expression, have *turn'd away their Ears from the Truth, and are turned unto Fables.* 2 Tim. 4. 4

Were any of the Terms of our Communion indeed unlawful, this would be cause sufficient to justify the Separation, and condemn all those who are, notwithstanding this, for upholding that sort of Worship: But since the ablest of our Adversaries could never shew this; since there is nothing enjoyn'd, but what might easily be sacrific'd to Peace with a good Conscience; whoever shall separate under these Circumstances, can hardly be excus'd from Sin.

But we have been told of late that the Dissenter is no Schismatic, tho' I know not with what Face of Truth it can be so pleaded: For if Schism be the Breach of that Communion, wherein a Man might have continued without Sin; otherwise there never was, or can be any such thing as Schism in the World; if it be a Voluntary Separation of our selves, without just cause given, from that Church whereof we were born Members; Our Dissenter can never acquit himself of this Crime.

'Tis not the Toleration that can secure his Innocence, the Benefit of that can extend no farther, than to exempt him from those Penalties which are annex'd to the Law for its security, and which otherwise would be inflicted upon him: But his Guilt is the same as ever; because he acts as much against the Law, although the Sanction of it be suspended, or abolished, as if it were still to continue in Force. And so long as any National Church

Church is establish'd by Law, whose Worship is innocent, no Power upon Earth, whatever it may do as to my Conformity, can dispense with my Obligation thereto, provided I am a Member thereof.

Vide.
Norris's
Charge of
Schism
continued.

These Truths are plain and clear, and have been of late substantially prov'd beyond Contradiction. But the success this Argument has had, has been no ways equal to its strength and clearness; it hath not had that Effect it ought to have, either of preserving Men from being Schismatics, or of reclaiming those that are so: And what is the reason of this, but that Men are insensible of the great Evil of Schism, and of the mischievous Consequences that attend it?

Did they but seriously consider what Care our Lord took to prevent it, and how diligent the Apostles were for the same purpose; What Cautions were given to avoid all those that were inclined that way, and what odious Titles are affix'd to it, as the *Work of the Flesh*, the *Work of the Devil*, and the like; They would not for Matters of a small moment incur the Danger of it.

But above all, are they guilty of the most obstinate Schism, who having no real Scruples of Conscience against our Communion, do notwithstanding divide from us, and mightily widen the Separation; and These are our *Occasional Conformists*, a sort of Men never to be vindicated, as long as Hypocrisy is blameable: For whatever specious Interpretations some may have put upon the matter, thereby to impose upon the Vulgar, and bring them

them over to a Party; and a noble Conquest is it to have them on our side in opinion, who are not able to discern the differences of things beyond such as affect their outward Senses; whatever Pleas, I say, have been urg'd in behalf of Occasional Conformity, I shall not be afraid to term the practice of it in despite of all the Arts of Dissimulation and Double-Dealing, scandalous and grossly Hypocritical; and in giving this Verdict, many of the Disfenters themselves (so forcible is Truth sometimes above Prejudice) do agree with me: For it is plain to all, who shut not their Eyes, that it is no Principle of Conscience, as has been pretended, that guides the Actions of these Men, and detains them from uniting with us; for that would oblige them to act uniformly, and at all times alike; but a Base Worldly Interest, and an Affectation of Power and Dominion; how otherwise is it possible that the Offer of a Place of Profit, or of a Share in the Government, should reconcile a Man to our way of Worship, who is sincere in the Objections he makes against it, when all the Exhortations, Perswasions and Arguments for Union that could be thought of; when Solutions full and clear have been return'd by way of Answer to all Objections; and which are the only proper Methods to be used in this case, have all prov'd ineffectual?

It is a Maxim of Common Prudence, *our of two Evils to chuse the least*: Now say our *Casuits* very rightly, These Evils can never be both of a Moral Nature; for no Man can be brought under an absolute and unavoidable Necessity to commit a sin!

But we certainly are fallen into the worst of times, when the Constitution of things, one would think, was inverted; when Hypocrisy, an Evil of a Moral Nature, and therefore the greater, is tolerated to prevent a less.

But before I dismiss this Subject, I cannot but take notice of another sort of Men, who, as Education and Preferment have chanc'd to determine them, are unluckily fallen within the Church, and nothing but a present subsistence out of her Revenues is the Chain that links them to her, but without any liking of each other. These, like the Viper, glad perhaps when cold and benumm'd to be receiv'd and entertain'd; when after a while they have gathered Warmth and Strength, and their Nature returns upon them, do most ungratefully spit their Venom against the very Bosom that cherisheth them.

These are they, who see nothing excellent enough in our Constitution to be contended for; who invidiously miscale an Hearty Concern for the Interest and Safety of our Establishment by the odious Names of Bitter Zeal, Fury, Uncharitableness, and the like; most groundlessly intimating, that the Church cannot shew a Detestation of Rebellion, Schism and Faction, without breaking in upon the Christian Duties of Peace, Love and Benevolence.

And thus while they act, do they not give us just occasion to think, either that they want nothing to compleat themselves Dissenters, but an Exchange
of

of Habit, their Principles being the ſame already with theirs; or that they are encourag'd by ſome Antimonarchical Zealots of the Nation to write Inveſtives againſt our *Sion*, and have a Penſion to ſpeak in favour of Schiſm and Faction? St. *Paul* tells the *Elders* met together at *Miletus*, that after his departing, *Grievous Wolves ſhould enter in among them, not ſparing the Flock.* And Acts. 20. 29. even to this day is the Generation of theſe Spiritual Wolves ſtill preſerv'd within this our Nation; and yet ſo oſcitant are ſome, whoſe Duty it is to deſcry the Approaches of this Enemy, and to drive him away, as not to be ſenſible there is any ſuch, or that they themſelves and their Flock are in any Danger thereby. 'Tis not therefore without Great Reaſon that our Church has inserted this Deprecatory Sentence into her moſt excellent Litany; *That God would deliver us from Sedition, Privy Conſpiracy and Rebellion, from all falſe Doctrine, Heresy and Schiſm, from Hardneſs of Heart, and Contempt of his Word and Commandment.*

And now, I ſuppoſe, enough may have been ſaid to ſhew the Degeneracy of the Preſent Age in reſpect of Principles; how regardless it is of Truth; how impatient of ſound and whoſom Doctrine. Upon which Conſideration let me only add theſe two Reflections briefly.

I. Firſt, if the times are ſuch, that Men *will not endure Sound Doctrine*, then 'tis much to be fear'd that all the Deſigns on Foot for a Reformation.

mation of Manners will be fruitless and ineffectual; And the Societies erected for this purpose in the *Metropolis* of this Kingdom, whatever they expect, will in all probability meet with very little, if any, success: For 'tis much the same thing, to hope to Reform the Body Politic by Penalties inflicted for some acts of Immorality committed, when at the same time 'tis distemper'd to so great a degree, as to loath and nauseate *Sound Doctrine*; as it is to endeavour to cleanse the Natural Body when diseas'd, and reduce it to an *Healthful Crasis* or Constitution by external applications only, when the Patient in the meanwhile rejects all proper and wholsom Medicines. Those who are engag'd in this work of Reformation, may bring Men indeed to condign Punishment for their more open and daring Vices; but will this alone beget a New Principle within? will not rather the Natural Effect of this be to make them sin the more clandestinely, and so add Hypocrisy to their Profaneness. But be it otherwise; for God forbid I should envy Success to a Design that is good, especially when the means to accomplish it are lawful and generous, as, in this Case, I suppose them to be; yet there is something else, besides a *Corruption in Manners*, that deserves to be discountenanc'd, and that is a *Corruption in Principles*. And this I thought fit to hint, because there are those, who pass with some for Men of a very Religious and Sanctified Life, whose Designs, if once put in Execution, would prove as fatal to the Community, as open Immorality and

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Profaneness; only with this difference, that the latter, as in reason might be expected, would provoke the Divine Justice to pour out his Vengeance upon us in an Extraordinary Manner; and the other would directly and immediately involve us in all the Miseries of a Civil War: And this Consequence of the two is rather to be dreaded most; since 'tis more Eligible to *fall into the hand of the Lord,* than *into the hand of Man.* 2 Sam. 24. 14.

Besides, as our Present Circumstances now stand under a General, and in a manner Unlimited *Toleration*; can the Work of Reformation be carried on with that Ease and Success, as otherwise it might be? Is it not natural for those, who are vitiously inclin'd, when they observe a Great Liberty granted this way, to think all Religion a Jest, and themselves injur'd, if they are not left free to cut out and model a Religion to their own Fancy, as well as others?

Moreover yet, by the means of a *Toleration* Men must needs be brought to have a low esteem and value, yea to scorn and condemn their Lawful Guides and Pastors; and to spurn at the wholsom Prescripts administred by the Regular Physicians of the Soul, and so betake themselves for a Cure to those *Spiritual Empirics* or Quacks licens'd by the State, who, if they chance to remove any Distemper, for the most part superinduce a worse, beyond the Art of any Reformers to dislodge.

Far

Far be it from me to grudge any well-meaning Dissenter the Benefit of a *Toleration*; but I cannot without some sort of Indignation observe to what an Heighth of Impudence and Presumption some Men, upon this very account, are arriv'd: Who, because the Civil Power has not restrain'd them from executing the Priest's Office, shall therefore have the Boldness to undertake it. Those, I mean, who have nothing to fit themselves for that Employment, but the bare Qualification which the Law requires, *viz.* of assenting to such particular Articles; assenting, I say, not subscribing, for that had been an hard Exaction upon such of them as cannot write. When these Men thus rarely endow'd shall invade the Sacred Office of the Ministry, that very Office, the Right Discharge whereof is a Matter of that Moment and Concern, as made the Apostle in Contemplation of it use this Solemn Exclamation: *Who is sufficient for these things?*

2 Cor. 12.
16.

Tho', in this Age, the Reverse of the Question might more properly be put: *Who is not sufficient?* When these, and such as these shall take upon them to expound the Sacred Oracles; e're they can well read them; Men *whose Mouths* ought rather to be stopped, *who subvert whole Houses, teaching things they ought not:* When every rude and illiterate Mechanic, that has but confidence enough to think himself inspir'd, shall assume the Office of instructing a Congregation, not half so ignorant as himself, and with an Air of

Titus. 1. 11.

of Authority shall dictate, and that under the name of Gospel, what pestilent and seditious Doctrines he pleases, it can be no Great Surprise to an Impartial Spectator to see these things end at length in the Ruine and Destruction of the Whole.

And yet how Fond are some of a Toleration, who have no shelter under it, though it were happy for the Church if they had? How eagerly do they contend for it, as if it were the Greatest Blessing a Nation could enjoy? when at the best it is but a Necessary Evil, and the Occasion of it shews, *We are not at Unity amongst our selves.*

II. If the Age is deprav'd to that Degree, as not to endure Sound Doctrine, then no Remedy more proper can be thought of to cure a Mad World, and reduce Men in some measure to a Soundness of Mind, than that most solemn Advice St. Paul gives Timothy, and all others of the same Office at the beginning of this Chapter of the Text: *I charge thee before God, &c. Preach the Word, be instant in season, out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine.*

They that are in Authority, as the Governors of the Church, are to *reprove* and *rebuke*, not only Men of corrupt Lives, but of corrupt Principles too; not only those of a mean and low,

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but of an high Station, if need require, and not connive at their Errors and wilful Miscarriages upon any Consideration whatever.

They are to *exhort* likewise, not only to Moderation toward our Dissenting Brethren, but sometimes to Conformity with the Church; and the rather, because, whatever new Schemes of Government might possibly heretofore have been thought of, it is not in the least probable that we shall ever be united, but upon the Foot of our Present Establishment.

In a word; As it is the Duty of all Men to make as much Conscience of Heresy and Schism, as of other Vices; so should it be the Care of the Rulers and Pastors of the Church to *dehort*, *dissuade* and *discourage* therefrom; but especially to *discountenance* whatever tends to the Propagation and Encrease of Schism and Faction, as our *Private Academies* most manifestly do; wherein Youth are so early prejudic'd against the present Form of our Constitution both Civil and Sacred, and sworn betimes, like *Hannibal* at the Altar, Enemies to our Church.

These things cannot chuse but have a very Malignant Influence upon the Peace and Welfare of any Nation, where they are tolerated; they must needs be destructive to the very Ends of Government, and therefore do deservedly challenge the Care and Vigilance of those in Authority to remedy

medy and prevent them, and to find out such proper and expedient Methods of crushing the Seeds of Rebellion in their growth, lest, under the Notion of a Charitable Indulgence of Men in designs that are really dangerous, being let alone, they get too great an Head; and so the Whole at last be involv'd in certain Ruine and Destruction.

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